

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Dr. Elina Bilman. I am a pediatric dentist who has been practicing in the state of Connecticut for over 13 years. In my practice, I see children of all ages as well as children and adults with special healthcare needs. It is important for me to be able to serve my community all inclusively, which is why a large portion of the children and special needs adults that I treat are on Medicaid. I love the diversity of my practice and seeing children grow up before my eyes from their first dental visit until they graduate.

Today I write to you in regards to the Governor's Proposed FY 23 Budget Adjustments of the Department of Social Services and the proposed increase to adult dental Medicaid reimbursement rates.

The costs of doing dentistry have increased tremendously especially due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, adult dental reimbursement rates have remained the same since 2008. These low reimbursement rates and higher overhead costs of running a dental practice lead to fewer dentists participating with the Medicaid program. For myself and for other general dentists in private practice it is becoming more and more cost prohibitive to be able to service the adult Medicaid population. As the access to care for these individuals is dwindling, these adults are more likely than their higher income counterparts to experience dental pain, report poor mouth health, and find their lives less satisfying due to poor oral health. Many of these Connecticut citizens end up seeking emergency care for oral conditions in local hospitals. It is far more cost effective, and better for the patient, to treat those issues before they become an emergency. Dental disease is the most preventable disease out there and oral health is essential to overall health. Untreated dental disease leads to complications in a patient's general health as well as worsens the quality of life of the affected individual. This is why dentist participation in the state Medicaid program is an important aspect of the dental care safety net to help provide these adults with the general and preventative dental care they need. By increasing the Medicaid reimbursement rates, the state of Connecticut will make it less cost prohibitive to participate with the Medicaid program and will certainly help increase access to care for these individuals and limit the overall costs of healthcare.

I often struggle trying to find another dentist or a dental specialist to see my special needs adults on Medicaid when a problem arises that is beyond my pediatric dental expertise, and it is very unfortunate, because these patients don't have anywhere else to go and they are the most vulnerable in our society.

I certainly don't want to stop treating my special needs adults due to the financial hardship, and my patients shouldn't have to seek care in a hospital when they can't find anyone else to treat them. Please do your part in helping to increase their access to quality care.

I thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully Submitted,

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